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BACK TO THE USSR?

Roman Solchanyk

Researchers at the Institute of General Genetics of the Russian Academy of Sciences apparently have come up with what can only be described as a sensational discovery—both for the world of science and the world of politics. The Russian geneticists claim that the “Soviet people” (*sovetskiy narod*), long the foundation upon which the Communist Party of the Soviet Union structured its nationalities policy, is a proven reality. Understandably, the prevailing view among Western Sovietologists—or at least among that small group who argued that nationalities issues in the Soviet Union deserved to be taken seriously—has been rather different, namely, that the concept of a “Soviet people” was an artificial ideological device invented by Leonid Brezhnev and Mikhail Suslov. Its purpose, briefly stated, was to shift the focus of the Soviet Union’s multinational conglomerate from an ethnic-cultural to a political-ideological identity and allegiance.¹ In the non-Russian republics of the Soviet Union, the notion of the “Soviet people” was seen as nothing less than a coverup for Russification policies, and in the course of Mikhail Gorbachev’s twin policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* the idea was discredited. Now, however, the Moscow researchers claim that the existence of the “Soviet people” is substantiated by

the “common genetics” of the various nations of the former Soviet Union and their single genetic “code.” Consequently, they argue, the “current dispersion into national quarters,” that is, the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of independent successor states, is “only a temporary historico-geographical fluctuation.” In short, the Soviet Union with its “Soviet people” will be back.

This thought-provoking discovery is reported by Arkady Volsky, head of the influential Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs and a key figure in the powerful Civic Union coalition, in a recent interview in *Pravda*.² Volsky cites the geneticists’ findings in support of his argument that the Soviet Union should not be written off as a lost cause. Although conceding that it would be unrealistic to assume that the former unitary state could be reincarnated “at the present stage of history,” he nonetheless maintains that state formations like pre-revolutionary Russia and the Soviet Union do not simply appear and then disappear without a trace. Like Gorbachev, who on various occasions argued that the Soviet Union is a “unique civilization,” the “natural result of an historical process,” and a “thousand-year-old state,”³ Volsky also sees Russia and the Soviet Union as interchangeable

1 See Roman Szporluk, “The Imperial Legacy and the Soviet Nationalities Problem,” in Lubomyr Hajda and Mark Beissinger, eds., *The Nationalities Factor in Soviet Politics and Society* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), pp. 7ff.

2 *Pravda*, September 9, 1992.

3 See Roman Solchanyk, “Ukraine, the Former Center, Russia, and ‘Russia,’” *Studies in Comparative Communism*, vol. 25, no. 1 (March 1992), pp. 31-45.



notions whose defining characteristics were historically predetermined:

The fact that for many hundreds of years precisely our peoples were within the framework of one state [is explained by] the existence of objective laws. And these laws (geopolitical, territorial-economic, cultural, and ethnic) have not disappeared.

Proceeding from the specific to the general, Volsky goes on to express his firm conviction that "humanity develops as a single organism" and that ethnic assimilation is a "natural and inevitable process." Sooner or later, he says, the concept of self-determination will have to be subjected to a critical reevaluation—and presumably will be discarded.

Admittedly, these are rather controversial views. One must assume that Volsky is not totally unaware of the Basques, Kurds, and the current situation in the former Yugoslavia. Closer to home, there are the Abkhaz and Ossetians in Georgia and the Chechens and Tatars in Russia itself, none of whom can be accused of displaying tendencies towards what Volsky sees as the irrepressible "erosion of ethnic contours." Then there is the ongoing Armenian-Azerbaijani struggle over Nagorno-Karabakh, a problem with which Volsky has had some personal experience. Back in 1988 he was dispatched by Gorbachev to the strife-torn Armenian enclave in Azerbaijan as a special envoy, and the following year he headed a special committee that imposed direct rule on the region from Moscow. Both experiments ended in failure, which Volsky refers to in his interview but fails to adequately explain. Only indirectly do we learn what, in his view, is the root cause of such unpleasant problems and, in the larger view, why the Soviet Union is no more: "The founders of the USSR were obviously romantics when they divided up the territory of Russia not into states and *gubernii* (provinces), but into national quarters." Stated differently, after October 1917 the victorious Bolsheviks should have abandoned their pretenses of internationalism and forthrightly declared the Soviet Union to be Russia in all but name.

Ordinarily, one could write all of this off as a variation on the genre that specializes in lamenting the collapse of the Soviet Union and agonizing over the loss of Russia's status as a great power that now dominates the so-called patriotic press in Russia. Much of these writings are openly anti-Western, often anti-Semitic, and unabashedly chauvinistic. But Volsky is neither an incurable nostalgic nor does he fit the image projected by a typical representative of the red-brown coalition of disgruntled communists and self-styled Russian patriots. His Civic Union, which counts Russian Vice President Alexander Rutskoi among its members, incorporated Russia's two largest political parties—the Democratic Party of Russia led by Nikolay Travkin (50,000 membership) and Rutskoi's People's Party of Free Russia (100,000 membership)—and is said to be able to count on the support of about 40 percent of the deputies of the Russian Supreme Soviet.⁴ This confers upon the Civic Union the role of power broker in Russian politics. That role is now being expertly implemented as President Boris Yeltsin and his acting prime minister, Yegor Gaidar, are confronted with a fundamental challenge from the red-brown opposition grouped in the recently established National Salvation Front. The latter has set itself the task of removing the president, bringing down the government, and restoring the Soviet Union.⁵ Volsky himself has the well-earned reputation of being the consummate practical politician. "Power belongs to those who have property and money," he is quoted as saying. "At present it is not the government but the industrial managers who have both."⁶ Although he has often denied it, many observers see Volsky as the next Russian prime minister. In any event, he has a clear idea of his mission:

To change politics. More precisely—to replace those politicians who fool the people with fairy tales that freedom and independence will bring them prosperity. Naturally, I am not talking about a violent change, not those kinds of operations, but about wholly parliamentary forms of struggle for political influence.⁷

⁴ Elizabeth Teague and Vera Tolz, "The Civic Union: The Birth of a New Opposition in Russia?" *RFE/RL Research Report*, vol. 1, no. 30 (July 24, 1992), pp. 1-11.

⁵ See "Spravedlivost'. Narodnost'. Gosudarstvennost'. Patriotizm. Deklaratsiya o sozdaniu ob'edinennoy oppozitsii," *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, March 10, 1992; "Politicheskaya deklaratsiya levoy i pravoy oppozitsii," *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, September 22, 1992; and "Obrashcheniye k grazhdanam Rossii orgkomiteata Fronta Natsional'nogo Spaseniya," *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, October 1, 1992.

⁶ *Financial Times*, November 2, 1992.

⁷ *Pravda*, September 9, 1992.

By all accounts, Yeltsin and his team fit the above description. Or do they? It is doubtful whether anyone could provide a definitive answer to this question at the present juncture. Responding to a journalist's query as to how he envisions the future Russian state, Yeltsin suggested that it was somewhat too early to pose this question, although he confided that he was preparing a "very serious document" on precisely this problem. Its basic thesis, he said, is that Russia is a unique country that will be neither socialist nor capitalist. "It will be Russia," he explained.⁸ Admittedly, this is rather vague. But that should come as no surprise. At the moment Russia and its leaders find themselves in the midst of an identity crisis brought upon them by the unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union. The crux of the issue is that after December 1991 the long-standing tautology USSR-Russia no longer makes any sense. For many Russians, Russia defined as the presently constituted Russian Federation also makes little sense. The dilemma was succinctly formulated by Rutskoi: "I do not want to live in a banana republic."⁹

Russia and the Unraveling of the USSR

On December 8, 1991, in a small village outside of Brest in Belarus, the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and the host country agreed to form the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In the process, they declared that the USSR had ceased to exist "as a subject of international law and as a geopolitical reality." Subsequently, the parliaments of the three Slavic states ratified the CIS agreements, specifically annulling the 1922 treaty that created the USSR. But it would be a mistake to conclude that the three signatories viewed this joint venture alike. Quite the opposite. The CIS may rightly be characterized as the product of a political compromise forced upon Russia (and Belarus) by Ukraine's rejection of Gorbachev's plans for a "renewed" Soviet Union.

Ukraine had been stalling with the signing of a new Union treaty since the first draft was made public in November 1990. After the failed putsch in August 1991 and Ukraine's declaration of independence, it was probably clear to most everyone except perhaps Gorbachev that Ukraine would not agree even to the proposed "union of sovereign states" enshrined in the final draft.¹⁰ Addressing the extraordinary Congress of USSR People's Deputies that opened on September 2, Ukrainian parliamentary chairman and soon to be president Leonid Kravchuk announced that Ukraine would clarify its position on the new Union treaty only after its December 1 referendum on independence.¹¹ As the referendum deadline approached, the Ukrainian position became increasingly intransigent. At a press conference in early November, Kravchuk told journalists that he had been persistently trying to convince Gorbachev that the so-called Novo Ogarevo process of negotiating a new Union treaty was pointless. "The Novo Ogarevo process," he insisted, "no longer exists and there is no need to return to it."¹² Correspondingly, Ukraine skipped the November 14 meeting of the State Council that resumed work on the treaty as well as the November 25 session that was to have witnessed the initialing of the document. In an interview published on the next day, Kravchuk bluntly dismissed the Soviet leader's plans as a "fraud" in which he refused to participate.¹³ At about the same time, Gorbachev was expressing his confidence that Ukraine would come on board:

I know that land very well—I think I more than know it—I have a feel for the Ukraine. I have a personal link with the Ukraine. My roots are in the region of Chernigov in the Ukraine. My other roots are in Voronezh, in Russia.... Some politicians are trying to prepare public opinion for a view that if the Ukraine votes for independence, that means that it votes for secession, but that is not so.... If we take a serious view of things, I am sure that we cannot even contemplate that the Ukraine would leave the union, because that would be big trouble for

⁸ *Argumenty i fakty*, no. 42, October 1992.

⁹ Quoted by Marina Pavlova-Sil'vanskaya, "U Rossii est' shans osta'sya velikoy derzhavoy," in Yu. G. Burtin, comp., *God posle augusta. Gorech' i vybor. Sbornik stately i inter'yu*. (Moscow: Literatura i politika, 1992), p. 151.

¹⁰ For the text, see *Pravda*, November 27, 1991. Developments in Ukraine during the last several years are surveyed in the recent publications by Bohdan Nahaylo, *The New Ukraine* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1992) and Taras Kuzio, *Ukraine: The Unfinished Revolution* (London: Institute for European Defence and Strategic Studies, 1992).

¹¹ For the text of Kravchuk's address, see *Radyan'ska Ukraina*, September 5, 1991.

¹² *Holos Ukrayny*, November 12, 1991.

¹³ *Izvestiya* (Moscow evening edition), November 26, 1991.

the union but even bigger trouble, a catastrophe, for the Ukraine.¹⁴

Even after the Ukrainian referendum, which yielded an unexpected vote of more than 90 percent in favor of independence, Gorbachev continued to press for a new Union treaty. On December 3, he issued an appeal to all parliamentarians, urging them to endorse his "confederative concept," stressing that failure to do so would result in "the most tragic of impending dangers—the severance and loss of centuries-long bonds by which history linked entire peoples, families, and individuals in an area constituting one-sixth of the earth's surface."¹⁵ Several days later, in an emotional and at times threatening interview for Ukrainian television, Gorbachev assured viewers that his ideas on the preservation of the Union had not yet been exhausted and that the struggle was just beginning. He also warned that an independent Ukrainian state would oppress the more than 11 million Russian minority there and that Moscow would take Kharkiv, the Donbass, and Crimea.¹⁶ By that time it was much too late.

Russia, unlike Ukraine, was prepared to sign the new Union treaty, albeit with modifications. Directly after the abortive coup, Yeltsin, in spite of his longstanding personal conflict with Gorbachev, reaffirmed his faith in a renewed Soviet Union and even expressed his support for the existence of a "Union center," a concept that was anathema to Kiev.¹⁷ In his address to the post-putsch Congress of USSR People's Deputies on September 3, he argued for "a slight departure from the Novo Ogarevo agreements," advocating the idea of "the coexistence of various forms of inter-state relations" within the Union:

That is, we should agree that there can be independent republics that insist on confederation and on federation, on associate membership and on an economic union, but that they nonetheless remain in some kind of single system.¹⁸

In the same speech, Yeltsin assured the deputies that Russia, having chosen democracy and freedom, "will never be an empire, neither an elder nor a younger brother. It will be an equal among equals." But on the same day he told CNN that in light of Russia's size and power and its role in crushing the coup, the key posts of prime minister, defense minister, KGB chairman, and interior minister in the Union should be reserved for Russians.

At the end of October, meeting with representatives of the Union of Russian Cities, Yeltsin insisted that Russia should not be the one to initiate the disintegration of the Soviet Union.¹⁹ And on November 30, after a meeting with Gorbachev, he told journalists that he had always supported the Union. The problem, he said, was Ukraine. Like Gorbachev, Yeltsin confided that he could not imagine a Union without Ukraine.²⁰ Gorbachev confirmed Yeltsin's readiness to adhere to the treaty if the proposals already made by the Russian parliament were appended to the text.²¹ Indeed, after another meeting with the Soviet President only two days before leaving for Minsk, Yeltsin maintained once again that a Union treaty without Ukraine was impossible, but argued that it should be signed nonetheless "because at the moment there is no alternative."²² Fielding journalists' questions about the meeting, the Russian leader noted:

It was not an easy conversation [with Gorbachev]. Not easy. The point is, as I have stated on more than one occasion, both at the State Council and in the media, that if Ukraine really will not be in the Union then I cannot imagine such a Union. Therefore, there must be some guarantee from Ukraine of whether Ukraine wants to sign the treaty. If Ukraine accedes to the Union and concludes the treaty, Russia will then do the same, and I think that its Supreme Soviet will support that.²³

Asked if he would seek other options if the Union could not be maintained, Yeltsin emphasized that "we must first talk about a Union treaty."

14 U.S. *News & World Report*, December 2, 1991, p. 65.

15 For the text, see *Izvestiya* (Moscow evening edition), December 3, 1991.

16 Central Television, December 8, 1991.

17 Address on Radio Rossiya, August 29, 1991.

18 *Rossiya*, September 6-10, 1991.

19 TASS, October 31, 1991.

20 Central Television, November 30, 1991.

21 See Gorbachev's interview with the Belarusian newspaper *Narodnaya gazeta*, November 30, 1991.

22 TASS, December 5, 1991; *The Times*, December 6, 1991.

23 Central Television, December 5, 1991.

It was only in his speech to the Belarusian parliamentary deputies on December 7, before the talks with Kravchuk and Belarusian parliamentary chairman Stanislau Shushkevich began, that Yeltsin gave a fairly clear indication that he held out little hope for Gorbachev's plans. Sounding more like Kravchuk, the Russian president said:

The attempt to reconstitute the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the Leninist interpretation has passed into history. The idea of half-federation and half-confederation has failed. If there remains even a tiny element of unitarianism, there is the risk that the system that has already brought us to a dead end will be reanimated.²⁴

Russia always wanted a union, he stressed, but without Ukraine "there will be many difficult problems, we will find ourselves on opposite sides of the barricades."

Russia, Ukraine, and the CIS

According to Yeltsin, Ukraine was asked to attend the meeting in Belarus, which had originally been planned for the signing of several Russian-Belarusian agreements, in order to determine its position on the Union treaty. Quite interesting in this regard is an interview with Shushkevich, where he reveals that when Yeltsin arrived in Minsk the two leaders immediately sat down to try and figure out "how to get Ukraine interested."²⁵ The premise, which was quite correct, was that Ukraine could not be expected to show much enthusiasm for a remodeled Soviet Union a week after its successful referendum. The referendum results were widely seen as effectively signaling the end of the Soviet Union. In Ukraine, they were also viewed as constituting a break with the centuries-long association with Russia.

Indeed, at his first press conference after being sworn in as president on December 5, Kravchuk affirmed that Ukraine was interested only in bilateral state agreements, and on the eve of the tripar-

titate talks he assured journalists that Yeltsin and Shushkevich would not succeed in talking him into any kind of new political union.²⁶ After returning to Kiev, Kravchuk said plainly that the Russian and Belarusian sides had hoped to forge a closer union but that "our referendum and our independence" had precluded such a possibility.

These were decisive. It became clear that Ukraine would not change its position, and thus Yeltsin and Shushkevich understood that to live together with Ukraine they would need to find an alternative—this alternative was the commonwealth.²⁷

The details of how the CIS was arrived at were revealed by Kravchuk in an interview with Russian television in early 1992. The Ukrainian president emphasized that Yeltsin acted as Gorbachev's messenger and posed three questions. Would Ukraine sign the existing draft of the Union treaty? The answer was "no." Would Ukraine sign the treaty with "some changes" if it were allowed to introduce them? Again the answer was "no." Finally, would Ukraine sign its own version of the treaty? Kravchuk responded that if Ukraine were to propose its own version it would not be a confederation but rather a commonwealth of states.²⁸ He also noted that the initiative to hold the talks were Ukraine's, but that the outcome proved to be entirely unexpected.

Thus, Ukraine and Russia agreed on a structure that the two sides view in diametrically opposed terms. From the very start, the democratic opposition grouped around Rukh had serious doubts about Ukraine's decision to join the CIS in the first place, which was reflected in the twelve "reservations" that the Ukrainian parliament appended to the CIS agreement during the ratification vote. Among them was the reaffirmation of the inviolability of state boundaries and the right to national armed forces and the downgrading of joint foreign policy activities from "coordination" to "consultation."²⁹ Dmytro Pavlychko, chairman of the parliamentary commission on foreign affairs, openly said just a day after the CIS was formed that

24 Sovetskaya Belorussiya, December 10, 1991.

25 Komsomolskaya pravda, January 9, 1992.

26 The Washington Post, December 8, 1991.

27 The Washington Post, December 10, 1991.

28 Russian Television, February 11, 1992. See also Kravchuk's interview with Sobesednik, no. 15, April 1992, pp. 6-7.

29 For the text, see Holos Ukrayiny, December 14, 1991.

Ukraine viewed it as a transitional body. "We are not signing it to last for centuries," he maintained, referring to the agreement.³⁰ Ivan Plyushch, a close associate of Kravchuk and his successor in the post of parliamentary chairman, described the CIS as "a way of helping the states of the former USSR go through a divorce process."³¹ Kravchuk himself has not been consistent in his public statements. On various occasions he has characterized the CIS as a hopeless affair and suggested that Ukraine would abandon the group; conversely, he has also expressed optimism to the effect that the CIS is a viable organization that has not exhausted its possibilities. Recently, he explained his position as follows:

I respect any organization that is useful. If it is useful, then I respect it; even if everyone is against its existence I am for it, because I see that one cannot do without it. Thus far, the CIS has not provided us with any benefits. I understand it is not beneficial for Ukraine to tear everything apart and abandon it. But if one looks at it in practical terms, it is of no use. The most important thing is bilateral relations, because when twelve countries get together it seems to me that each has a totally different orientation; and perhaps different circumstances, perhaps different objectives.³²

Overall, it would certainly be no exaggeration to say that Kiev views the CIS experiment with a large dose of skepticism.

Moscow's approach to the CIS is a rather different matter. Henry Kissinger has offered the judgment that "Russian nationalism translates into a desire to restore traditional dominance over the other republics." Correspondingly, "the Russians see the Commonwealth as a mechanism to preserve as much of the central machinery as they can."³³ Similarly, *Literaturnaya gazeta*, commenting on the CIS shortly after its creation, wrote that Gorbachev's resignation by no means translates into the destruction of the center, but rather "the transfer of the idea of central power into other hands."³⁴ From

the Russian viewpoint, more precisely from the viewpoint of Yeltsin and his entourage, the CIS also serves another and perhaps more important purpose, namely, it provides a "civilized" way for Russia to maintain the link to Ukraine. The alternative is the one offered by Sergey Baburin, an influential leader of the patriotic forces in the Russian parliament and a central figure in the National Salvation Front, who is quoted as telling Kiev's ambassador in Moscow that "either Ukraine reunites with Russia or there will be war."³⁵ The National Salvation Front has a very specific view of independent Ukraine (and independent Belarus), which was expressed at its founding congress in October 1992:

We will never accept the independence of the regimes in Ukraine and Byelorussia! Our attitude towards the regimes in Ukraine and Byelorussia is defined not by the norms of international law but by the norms of the [Russian?] Criminal Code.³⁶

Why the Russian-Ukrainian link is thought to be so crucial in Moscow has more to do with history than any number of practical considerations. Briefly stated, for many Russians, irrespective of their political convictions, the "loss" of Ukraine represents the loss of a key aspect of Russian history and, consequently, national identity. Baburin explains:

Little Russia [Ukraine] is the central, primordial Russia. Kiev is the mother of Russian cities. When they say Great Russia, that is already the periphery. In comparison to Kiev, we are on the periphery, because all of this was the gradual expansion of a single Slavic state.³⁷

This view, which has deep roots in Russian political thought, cannot accept the legitimacy of an independent Ukraine (and Belarus) for the simple reason that it negates the traditional view of what constitutes the defining characteristic of the Russian nation, that is, "all-Russianness" (*obshcherusskost'*). Reading someone like Nikolay Lysenko, whose National Republican Party of Russia is part

30 *The Washington Post*, December 10, 1991.

31 *Financial Times*, February 20, 1992.

32 Anatolii Mykhailenko, "Dva dnia z prezydentem," *Ukraina*, no. 31, October 1992, p. 4.

33 Henry A. Kissinger, "The New Russian Question," *Newsweek*, February 10, 1992, p. 35.

34 *Literaturnaya gazeta*, January 1, 1992.

35 *Izvestiya* (Moscow evening edition), May 26, 1992.

36 *Izvestiya* (Moscow evening edition), October 27, 1992.

37 Ostankino Television, October 16, 1992.

of the National Salvation Front, immediately conjures up images of Pyotr Struve or Georgy Fedotov. For Lysenko, the dangers of which Struve and Fedotov warned, have already come to pass:

It seems to me that today the synonym for an ideological understanding of "nationality" (*narodnost'*) can only be "all-Russianness." Why is precisely this semantic infusion of the term important? In order to understand this, it is necessary to appreciate the main result of the now final epoch of *perestroika*, which, I am convinced, consists of the schism of the East Slavic ethno-political space into Russia, Ukraine, and Byelorussia. All other "achievements" of *perestroika*, in spite of their infamy and criminality, nonetheless will not result in catastrophe for Russia.³⁸

Lysenko draws the obvious conclusion:

That is precisely why the first and foremost task of Russian national-state ideology is the preparation of public consciousness for the speediest reunification and, this time, the full organic fusion of Russia, Ukraine, and Byelorussia into a single Russian Empire.³⁹

Gasan Guseinov, one of the most insightful analysts of today's Russian question, succinctly captures the essence of the problem when he writes that in the absence of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation is faced with the loss of Ukraine not as a "fraternal republic" but as its "historic achievement."⁴⁰

Moreover, the inability to come to terms with Ukraine's independence is not a monopoly of self-styled Russian patriots and political groupings on the fringes of the Russian radical right. Kissinger's claim not to have met a Russian who accepted that Ukraine can be truly independent may well be somewhat overstated, but the point is well taken. Statements like those made by Rutskoi that "the historical consciousness of Russians does not permit anyone to mechanically bring the borders of Russia in line with those of the Russian Federation" or Deputy Prime Minister Mikhail Poltoranin's ref-

erence to Kravchuk's "separatism" when discussing nationality problems in Russia indicates that the Russian White House is also not entirely immune to the Russian imperial legacy.⁴¹

Against this background, it comes as no great surprise that the Fifth Congress of Russian People's Deputies, which convened at the end of October 1991, approved a special appeal to the citizens of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, pleading that every effort should be made to avert what the Russian lawmakers saw as a "national catastrophe" for the people of the three Slavic states, that is, the "severance of their blood relationship and unity." "The absolute independence of our republics," read the appeal, "is the independence of sisters from their brothers, parents from their children, and the elderly from their grandchildren!"⁴² Perhaps it should also come as no surprise that, according to officials in the Bush Administration, in the fall of 1991 Yeltsin requested that the U.S. President do everything in his power to prevent Ukraine's separation from the Soviet Union.⁴³

Russia, the CIS, and Integration: For and Against

Clearly, the collapse of the Soviet Union has left a vacuum in its wake that has not been filled by the CIS. The "emptiness" has been felt most strongly in Russia, where the search for a post-Soviet identity is the problem that dominates the current political agenda. Quite interesting in this regard is a confidential document, excerpts from which were leaked in August 1992, prepared by Yevgeny Ambartsumov, head of the parliamentary commission on foreign affairs. The report, summing up closed-door hearings on Russia's foreign policy, called for the rejection of the staunchly Western-oriented course associated with Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev and proposed instead what was described as a "Russian Monroe Doctrine" for the CIS:

As the internationally recognized legal successor to the USSR, the Russian Federation's foreign policy must be based on the doctrine that

38 N. N. Lysenko, "Nasha tsel'—velikaya imperiya!" *Golos Rossii*, no. 4, 1992, p. 3.

39 Ibid. See also the interview with Lysenko in *Nash sovremenik*, no. 9, 1992, pp. 122-30.

40 Gasan Guseinov, "Istoricheskiy smysl politicheskogo kosnoyazychiya," *Znamya*, no. 9, 1992, p. 196.

41 Alexander Rutskoi, "V zashchitu Rossii," *Pravda*, January 30, 1992; M. Poltoranin, "My idem cherez goryashchii les..." *Trud*, January 14, 1992.

42 For the text, see *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, November 20, 1991.

43 *Izvestiya* (Moscow evening edition), November 27, 1991.

proclaims the entire geopolitical space of the former [Soviet] Union the sphere of its vital interests (along the lines of the USA's "Monroe Doctrine" in Latin America) and to secure from the world community understanding and recognition of Russia's special interests in this space. Russia must also secure from the international community the role of political and military guarantor of stability throughout the former space of the USSR.⁴⁴

What is surprising is not the vision of Russia's role in the "near abroad," a term that in itself has been described as symbolic of Russia's attitude towards the former "fraternal republics."⁴⁵ More interesting is the degree to which this vision, characterized by *Izvestiya* as that of "Eurasia's gendarme," overlaps with another document, entitled "For a Russia Strong, Single, Democratic, and Flourishing." The latter constitutes the Civic Union's ideological platform for the upcoming Congress of Russian People's Deputies, which is seen by the opposition as the venue for the final showdown with Yeltsin.⁴⁶

Plans for closer integration within the CIS have found fertile ground in Kazakhstan, where Russians and Kazakhs form nearly an equal proportion of the population. In August 1992, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev was reported to be set to propose a new union of former Soviet republics characterized by stronger mutual ties and obligations "along all fronts" to replace the CIS.⁴⁷ Soon thereafter, he expressed his dissatisfaction with the CIS, emphasizing that Kazakhstan had always been and remained a proponent of "unifying principles." What became known as Nazarbaev's five-point integration plan, consisting of a banking union, an economic court, a council for economic coordination, a strengthened military-political union, and a functioning Inter-Parliamentary Assembly was presented to the summit of CIS heads of state in Bishkek in October 1992, but made little progress largely due to Ukraine's opposition. Similarly, plans for a CIS charter, which were opposed by Ukraine from the very start, have had to be postponed because of Kiev's objections. The Inter-Par-

liamentary Assembly, of which Ukraine is not a member, is proceeding with the participation of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Armenia. At its first plenary session in September 1992 it established its rules and, among other initiatives, approved a document on "Fundamental Directions for the Rapprochement of National Laws of the CIS Countries." The participants selected Ruslan Khasbulatov, Russia's parliamentary chairman, as the Assembly's leader and chose St. Petersburg as the permanent seat for the organization. Khasbulatov's inclination towards integration is reflected in his support of common citizenship on the territory of those states participating in the Assembly.⁴⁸

Nazarbaev's initiatives have drawn a decidedly negative response from Kravchuk, who characterized them as retrogressive. In response to such criticism, the Kazakh president insisted that he favored neither a new Soviet Union nor a confederation and that his proposals had been misinterpreted. The entire world was moving in the direction of further integration, he asserted, and there was no reason why the CIS should not follow suit.⁴⁹ Nazarbaev's disavowals notwithstanding, Kravchuk has continued to hammer home the idea that Ukraine is firmly opposed to the reanimation of any kind of central structure. Meeting with his top officials in September, the Ukrainian president referred to "some leaders" who, having sensed the mood of the people, are again calling for the creation of a confederation and common structures, thereby posing a threat to Ukraine's independence.⁵⁰ Several weeks later, Kravchuk again emphasized that "we will firmly reject all attempts to turn back the wheel of history and revive the old imperial center by camouflaging them with illusory slogans about a single economic or some such space, the need for more economic cooperation, and the like."⁵¹

Kravchuk's position has been echoed by the leaders of Belarus and Moldova. Shushkevich characterized Nazarbaev's proposals as a "propaganda step," and on the eve of the Bishkek summit he

44 *Izvestiya* (Moscow evening edition), August 7, 1992.

45 See Heinz Timmerman, "Russland auf der Suche nach einem neuen aussenpolitischen Profil," *Osteuropa*, vol. 42, no. 10 (October 1992), pp. 821ff.

46 Excerpts from the platform are published in *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, October 21, 1992.

47 *Rabochaya tribuna*, August 7, 1992.

48 *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, September 17, 1992.

49 Interfax, September 21, 1992. See also the interview with Nazarbaev in *Le Monde*, September 27-28, 1992.

50 *Izvestiya* (Moscow evening edition), September 9, 1992.

51 *Molod' Ukrayny* and *Nezavisimost'* for September 22, 1992.

maintained that, although a common ruble zone was convenient for his country, Belarus would not agree to closer ties within the CIS at the summit.⁵² Mirecea Snegur of Moldova, which has yet to ratify the CIS agreements, specifically rejected Nazarbaev's call, noting that his country is categorically against the creation of CIS centralized structures.⁵³ Of the Central Asian states, Turkmenistan announced shortly before the Bishkek meeting that it would take a stand against "any kind of mutually interdependent collective system."⁵⁴ That leaves Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, whose leaders, although on record as opposing confederation, have favored integration within the CIS. This is particularly true of Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev, who has argued for a "two-speed" CIS composed both of a hard-core membership supporting closer cooperation and a group that could opt for associate membership or even observer status.⁵⁵ In the meantime, Azerbaijan's parliament voted not to ratify the CIS founding documents.⁵⁶

Conclusion

Zbigniew Brzezinski has argued that the litmus test for Russia's future course of development is whether or not it can live with an independent Ukraine.⁵⁷ That issue has yet to be resolved. In June 1992, a Kiev newspaper published a memorandum on Ukraine prepared by the European Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences that posited four scenarios for Russia's Ukrainian policy. The first, which was considered to be unacceptable, was a military solution. The second focused on close and friendly relations through concessions and a maximum degree of compromise. The third aimed to transform Ukraine into a "semi-independent state" by pressure politics that would impose on Kiev a line serving Russia's interests. The final option was thought to be the most acceptable:

Keep the Ukrainian problem within a definite framework, not allow it to get out of control, and maintain the basic elements of cooperation

and friendly relations between the two peoples through a combination of policies of reconciliation, pressure, and wide-ranging use of international instruments, waiting until Kiev outgrows its period of striving for self-assertion.⁵⁸

The desired results are to be achieved by, *inter alia*, the "greatest possible degree of isolation of Ukraine in the political and diplomatic area, restricting its political influence and its possibilities of receiving aid," and by "putting its most shameless figures under fire from international criticism by creating an image of an authoritarian-nationalist and neo-communist regime." Such recommendations fall short of Russia's declared intention of conducting its relations with the "near abroad" on the basis of equality and parity. No less disturbing, from Kiev's standpoint, is the version of the draft Russian-Ukrainian treaty prepared by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which includes clauses establishing a joint military doctrine and provides for the use of Ukrainian territory by Russia's military.⁵⁹ The document has been rejected.

Clearly, there are no easy solutions to a problem bequeathed by several centuries of historical development. In April 1992, when Yeltsin found himself under pressure from the patriotic opposition at the Russian Congress of People's Deputies, he reminded the deputies that Russia had never seceded from the USSR, that is, Russia was not to blame for its disintegration.⁶⁰ Indeed, the Russian Federation remains the only former Soviet republic not to have proclaimed its independence. To do so would provide a clear signal that Russia was prepared to abandon its imperial legacy.

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52 *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, September 23, 1992; ITAR-TASS, October 9, 1992.

53 *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, October 9, 1992.

54 Ostantino Television, October 8, 1992.

55 *Prauda*, October 8, 1992.

56 *Azerinform-TASS*, October 7, 1992.

57 Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The West Adrift: Vision in Search of a Strategy," *The Washington Post*, March 1, 1992.

58 *Vechirniy Kyiv*, June 18, 1992.

59 For the text, see *Vechirniy Kyiv*, September 21, 1992.

60 For the text of Yeltsin's speech, see *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, April 23, 1992.

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